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Connections with the homeland: Community and individual bonds between South Australian Italian migrants from Caulonia (Calabria) and their hometown

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ABSTRACT

Italian migrants from the southern Italian town of Caulonia in Calabria have had a conspicuous presence in South Australia since the interwar period. Between 1927 and 1940 Caulonia was numerically the highest ranked Calabrian town represented in South Australia and, due to chain migration, remained so in the post-war period. The *cauloniesi* in Adelaide are a visible and enterprising Italian community with a deep-rooted attachment to their birthplace. Caulonia's underdeveloped economic resources and high unemployment rate have induced thousands of *cauloniesi* to migrate in search of a more dignified future.

The more recent transnational approaches to migration studies do not consider migration simply as a process of departure and settlement in a new country, but they also take into account the links that the migrants maintain with their homeland. Using oral testimonies provided by a number of *cauloniesi* in South Australia and in Italy the author explores the cultural and emotional bonds that exist today between the Cauloniese migrants and their hometown. The connections include: community and personal bonds that these migrants maintain with Caulonia, and the influence that such ties have on their cultural identity; the significance of return visits, and the extent to which these visits consolidate and reinforce the migrants' identity and heritage; and the attitudes of the non-migrants in Caulonia towards their townsfolk who have settled in South Australia.

This study explores the significance of cultural and emotional ties that the Cauloniese migrants in South Australia maintain with their hometown in Italy as a community and individually. The community bonds are examined through religious practices that are most noticeable and significant at the time of the celebration of the religious feast of the patron saint, while the individual connections are investigated through two-way visits of groups and individuals who travel from Australia to Caulonia and vice versa. The paper demonstrates that the migration experience of the Cauloniese migrants, like that of other migrants, cannot be fully understood by looking solely at their experience of settlement in Australia. Rather, migrants are embedded in multi-

layered, multi-sited transnational social fields, encompassing those who move and those who stay behind (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1003). Thus, in this paper emigration is seen as a dynamic, circular process based on systems of social relationships that include both the town of departure as well as that of arrival (Signorelli, 2006).¹

Transnational studies in the field of migration have increasingly recognised that migrants and their descendants maintain strong, enduring ties with the home country even while they are incorporated into countries of resettlement (Levitt, DeWind and Vertovec 2003:565) and that they remain strongly influenced by these ties or by the social networks that stretch across national borders, even when they are geographically distant (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Baldassar 2001). Since the early work of Glick Schiller et al. in the 1990s on a new transnational analytic framework, there has been a substantial body of literature, especially in the USA, that has looked at this process rooted in the migrants' everyday life activities, which are affected by sustained connections with people and institutions in places of origin or elsewhere in diaspora.² Religious practices and family relationships maintained across borders, for example, are salient in many migrants' day-to-day lives and exercise an important influence over the ways in which migrants are integrated into the host society and stay attached to their homeland. Today, new technologies of communication and transportation allow migrants to sustain more frequent, more regular and less expensive connections with their homeland than in previous decades; in addition, migrants in Australia today encounter a social context that is much more tolerant of ethnic diversity compared to the past when assimilation was expected. Rather than feeling pressured to abandon the unique traits of their identity, migrants today tend to feel encouraged to sustain their cultural diversity by reinforcing and rediscovering their relationship with their birthplace. In the context of studies in Australia on Italian migrants, in the 1980s the oral history project by Wilton and Rizzo investigated the experience of migrants in Sydney from Limina, in Sicily, and the sense of displacement the migrants felt when they returned to visit their hometown, which had advanced economically, but had lost, in the eyes of the migrants, the solidarity and the closeness that used to characterise community life (Wilton & Rizzo 1983:65).

The studies that have most particularly emphasised the transnational connections that migrants in Australia maintain with their hometown are those by the anthropologist Loretta Baldassar. In her research, which culminated in the publication in 2001 of the volume *Visits Home* based on migrants from the town of San Fior in the Veneto region who have settled in Western Australia, Baldassar analysed their experience of visiting and returning to their hometown and the impact on their identity of the ties that the Sanfioresi have maintained in Australia. Two important aspects arose from Baldassar's analysis: firstly, that migration is not only a process of departure and settlement in a new country, but that the return and the visits to the hometown are integral stages of the migratory process; secondly, that both the ethnic

¹ See Signorelli, A. (2006) *Migrazioni e incontri etnografici*. Palermo: Sellerio, in particular chapters 1 and 6.

² See in particular Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., Blanc-Szanton, C., (2003) Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration, in Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., Blanc-Szanton, C. (eds) *Towards a transnational perspective on migration. Race, class, ethnicity, and nationalism reconsidered*, New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 645: 1 and the special issue dedicated to transnational migration of the *International Migration Review* (2003), Volume 37, Number 3, Fall. Available at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/toc/imre/37/3>

identity of the first-generation migrants and that of their children continually evolve and are also shaped through a variety of constant transnational links between the host and the home country.

In a subsequent work, Baldassar broadened her analysis to the migration experience of migrants from the Veneto region who settled in Australia. With Ros Pesman, she explored their contribution to their new homeland, their settlement experiences and their continuing connections with their birthplace, concluding that the “social relations that develop out of return visits reveal that migrants draw upon and create fluid and multiple identities grounded both on their old and their new homelands” (Baldassar & Pesman 2006:209).

More recently in the volume *Families Caring Across Borders* Baldassar examined how migrants and non-migrants confront and negotiate aged care obligations across borders (Baldassar, Vellekoop Baldock and Wilding 2007).

In the context of a transnational framework, this paper focuses on activities that link the Cauloniese migrants to their place of origin, Caulonia, and demonstrates that the bonds maintained by the *cauloniesi* in Australia through religious practices and visits to their hometown and visits to Australia by *cauloniesi* in Italy enable them to sustain a sense of belonging to their group. Firstly, it shows that the connections with a network of *compaesani*³ in the hometown, who share the same religious practices, strengthen the sense of belonging of the migrants to Caulonia and reinforce their differentiation from other Italian groups in South Australia. Secondly, the analysis of the motivation and the dynamics of the reciprocal visits demonstrate that the visits to the hometown have a transformative impact on the Cauloniese migrants’ identity, while the visits to Australia by the return migrants and by the townspeople who did not migrate contribute to maintaining community relationship across borders.

The sample comprises migrants from Caulonia, a town that has been deeply affected by the migration phenomenon as its population almost halved between 1921 and 2005, dropping from almost 14,000 in 1921⁴ to just over 7,500 in 2005.⁵ Cauloniese migration is particularly relevant because of the proportionately large percentage of arrivals in SA. In the interwar period, Caulonia was the second most common birthplace of Italian migrants settling in South Australia,⁶ and in the post-war distribution, it became the town that of the whole of Italy has given the highest number of settlers to SA.⁷ Among the Australian states, South Australia was, and still

³ A *compaesano* is someone from the same town.

⁴ According to census statistics, the peak in the number of inhabitant in Caulonia occurred in 1921 when there were 13,838 people (see Comune di Caulonia – Statistiche available at <http://www.caulonia2000.it/pagine/pagvarie/stat.htm>).

⁵ According to census statistics, on 1st January 2007 the population of Caulonia numbered 7,434 residents. (See Demografia in cifre ISTAT, available at <http://demo.istat.it/pop2007/index.html>).

⁶ According to the O’Connor database derived from the Passenger Statement forms A 42 (AASA D4880/1 & 2), between 1927 and 1940, a total of 87 migrants from Caulonia settled in SA. See O’Connor, D., (1996). *No need to be afraid, Italian Settlers in South Australia between 1839 and the Second World War*, Kent Town SA: Wakefield Press, 118.

⁷ According to the O’Connor post-war database derived from Alien Registration Cards D4881/1, D4881/2, D4881/3, National Archives of Australia, between 1948 and 1971 1,541 Cauloniese migrants settled in South Australia. See: O’ Connor, D. (2004). “The post-war settlement of Italians in South Australia” in D. O’Connor (ed.) *Memories and Identities. Proceedings of the Second Conference on the impact of Italians in South Australia*, Adelaide SA: Australian Humanities Press.

is, the state with the highest number of Caulonia-born Italians, followed by Western Australia and Victoria. The *cauloniesi* in Adelaide are a visible and enterprising Italian community, well known for their devotion to their patron saint, Saint Hilarion, as well as for their contribution and commitment to aged care.

Studying a community transnationally means making comparisons between the homeland and the new land, in order to analyse the experiences of both those who migrated and those who stayed behind. According to Peggy Levitt, the latter “have only been indirectly influenced by ideas, objects and information flowing across borders” (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004:1012).

The primary source of research data for this study was a series of oral testimonies collected from three sample groups and based on a detailed questionnaire prepared specifically for each group. The first group was interviewed in Australia and consisted of fifty-three *cauloniesi* who settled permanently in South Australia, of whom ten settled in the interwar period, and forty-three in the post-Second World War period. They were asked about their reasons for migrating and for choosing South Australia, their settlement difficulties, their employment experiences, the significance of the celebration of the feast in honour of their patron saint, their ongoing connections, if any, with their homeland and their sense of ‘Italianness’ (*italianità*) in Australia. The second group comprised nineteen *cauloniesi* who migrated to Australia and then, after a period spent in Australia, chose to return permanently to Caulonia, while the third group consisted of fifteen *cauloniesi* who did not migrate. The latter groups were interviewed in Caulonia and the questions asked of the return migrants and of the non-migrants also covered topics such as the reasons, in the case of returnees, for repatriating and resettling in Italy and, in the case of those who did not migrate, their attitudes towards those who left and the extent of the connections that they themselves maintain with migrants. Of those interviewed fifty-three were men and thirty-four women. Most participants agreed to be interviewed in their own home, but when this was not possible an alternative place was chosen. Many interviews were conducted in Caulonia in shops and workshops where the participants were employed. The interviews lasted on average of two hours and the informants were always advised that the interview could be conducted in Italian, English or both. Ninety per cent of the informants chose to be interviewed in Italian. Those who had migrated to Australia when they were under 10 years of age preferred to be interviewed in English.

The *cauloniesi* in Adelaide were a particularly suitable sample for this study because of their expressed interest in the maintenance of their customs and traditions. Like other Italian communities, the Cauloniese community has recreated in Australia tangible evidence of a collective memory of their village of origin. The most enduring and prominent connection with Caulonia is the celebration of the religious festival of the town’s patron, Saint Hilarion, a festival begun in 1955 and one of the first Italian *feste* in Adelaide in the post-war period.⁸ The Adelaide *festa* has always been organised independently from the one celebrated in Italy. The decision to initiate the feast was made by a group of four migrants who felt the need to strengthen the ties with Caulonia by introducing in Australia a religious tradition from their own town. Initially they gathered with a few devotees at the Church of St. Joseph in Flinders Park to venerate a small statue of Saint Hilarion. The following year, a larger statue, which is still used today, was brought from Caulonia and a bigger celebration of the

⁸ *La Fiamma*’s Special Edition reported: “La prima festa fu promossa dai calabresi di Caulonia in onore di Sant’Ilarione Abate. Eravamo nel 1955”. (“The first feast was promoted by the Calabrians from Caulonia in honour of Saint Hilarion, abbot. It was 1955”). October 1963, p. 37.

fiesta took place.⁹ The prominence of the festivities has gradually increased over the last twenty years, such that today they are attended by up to seven thousand people who also come from other parts of Australia. The *fiesta* plays a vital part in the lives of the *cauloniesi* in Adelaide: it not only increases their participation in religious activities, but it is also an avenue for strengthening their sense of belonging to their birthplace.

By celebrating in South Australia the ritual related to Saint Hilarion, the *cauloniesi* have widened the boundaries of their traditional religious practices, have given these practices a local identity and have enabled the group to cut out a niche for themselves distinct from that of other regional or town-based Italian communities.

The fact that most interviewees reported that they do not attend Sunday Mass or other religious functions, but never miss a religious feast dedicated to Saint Hilarion, demonstrates that for some migrants this religious connection with the hometown is more meaningful and inspires stronger loyalties than a more universal faith, in their case, Catholicism.¹⁰

Members of the clergy in Caulonia have sometimes been invited to Adelaide. The most well-known and charismatic priest has been Father Domenico Lamberto, who was brought out to Adelaide from Caulonia several times to celebrate the Mass for the feast. In 1991 he brought to the Cauloniese community in Adelaide a much appreciated gift from Caulonia: a wooden reproduction, sculpted by a local Cauloniese, of the reliquary silver arm that is used in the celebration in Caulonia. Since then the relic has accompanied the statue in the procession during the feast in Adelaide.

In October 1997, a delegation of no less than 60 *cauloniesi*, led by the Mayor of Caulonia, arrived in Adelaide to participate in the annual feast-day celebrations and to sign a Friendship Agreement (*Accordo d'Amicizia*) between Caulonia and the South Australian municipal Council of Charles Sturt. At a reception held for the delegation, the Caulonia Mayor thanked the Adelaide *cauloniesi* for keeping alive their customs and traditions, adding:

We have travelled thousands of kilometres to embrace you, to embrace you with great affection for what you have done for us, because we miss you, our town misses you. [...] We are grateful for your sacrifice, which has given to many others who stayed behind the chance to survive. Emigration has been the most significant fact in the history of our people this century. Your sacrifice has completely changed the history and the face of Caulonia.¹¹

⁹ See also the detailed volume on the Italian *feste* in South Australia, Paganoni, A. & O'Connor, D. (1999). *Se la processione va bene... Religiosità popolare italiana nel Sud Australia*, Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 102-103.

¹⁰ For the role that religion plays in transnational migration see: Levitt, P. (2003). "You know, Abraham was really the First Immigrant": Religion and transnational migration. *International Migration Review* 37, 3 Fall: 847-873. Available at: <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/toc/imre/37/3>

¹¹ *Il Globo*, 10 Nov. 1997, p. 18.

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In October the following year the Adelaide Cauloniese community welcomed to the feast of Saint Hilarion another eminent visitor from Italy: the Bishop of Locri-Gerace, Mons. Giancarlo Bregantini. The Italian newspaper *Il Globo* reported that at a special evening held in the Bishop's honour, the President of the Saint Hilarion Society in his role as president of the Federation of Calabrian Clubs of South Australia, welcomed Mons. Bregantini with the words:

For us your visit strengthens the bonds that we have with the motherland and with the living Church in Calabria. Through the pioneer generation, which is now getting on in years, as you were able to see this morning during your visit to the three nursing homes, our memories and experiences come together and give each other support. They come together because our common roots and Christian origins enable us to speak the same language and express the same cultural values.¹²

To reciprocate the visit to Adelaide of the Cauloniese delegation in 1997, two years later the Society of Saint Hilarion organised a visit to Caulonia of a group of Adelaide *cauloniesi* to coincide with the religious celebration of the Easter festivities.

In 2005 a special celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Adelaide feast took place. For the occasion, a group of over twenty *cauloniesi* travelled especially from Caulonia to Adelaide to participate in the various events, during which gifts were exchanged between the Society of Saint Hilarion and the town council of Caulonia and between the Society and the Bishop of Locri-Gerace.¹³

As highlighted in the examples above, the religious practice of the celebration of the feast enables the Cauloniese migrants to strengthen their sense of belonging to their birthplace. Although the *fešta* is organised independently from the one celebrated in Caulonia, the Cauloniese migrants stay connected to their sending community by celebrating the feast in the same week that it is commemorated in Italy, by participating in parallel religious activities such as the triduum of prayers, and by using the same worship symbols, the statue, the reliquary arm and the procession. Furthermore, the Caulonia-Adelaide religious practices are visibly connected through the visit to Adelaide of religious leaders, the participation in religious rituals and worship during return visits and through the exchange of symbolic gifts.¹⁴ In this way, the members of the Australian-Cauloniese community not only maintain and strengthen the connections between themselves and their hometown Caulonia but, by sharing with the non-migrants the celebration of religious practices both in Australia and in Caulonia, they encourage the non-migrants to gain a sense of belonging to a social and religious cross-border community in Australia. The importance of the contacts that had been established between the two communities was highlighted by the Mayor of Caulonia who in his welcome speech delivered to a group of Adelaide *cauloniesi* visiting Caulonia in 1999 said:

¹² *Il Globo*, 9 Nov. 1998, p. 14.

¹³ *Il Globo*, 31 Oct. 2005, p. 36.

¹⁴ For a classification of the individual and group activities that take place in the transnational religious field between migrants and their hometowns see: Levitt, P. *op. cit.*: 847-873.

A new phase has begun, from which has sprung an extraordinary cultural enrichment that marks a very important moment for repairing a laceration that dates back to the 1940s and 1950s when the departures were at their peak.¹⁵

If on the one hand these religious rituals and connections enable the Cauloniese migrants in Australia to sustain a sense of belonging to the hometown, on the other the non-migrants in Caulonia develop a sense of membership of an extended community on the other side of the world.

The religious connections that led to the foundation of the Adelaide feast have also brought about the establishment of the Society of Saint Hilarion, an organisation that in turn has assumed distinctive characteristics of its own and has become a symbol of local identity that serves to differentiate the *cauloniesi* from other Italian communities in South Australia.

Originally founded in 1969 in order to promote the devotion to Saint Hilarion and in particular the annual feast day celebration in October, the Society of Saint Hilarion has developed beyond its initial scope with the establishment of a social club and three nursing homes. A great deal of fundraising through social events has enabled the Society to build the Saint Hilarion Community Centre, which as the principal venue for social activities that involve the whole Cauloniese group, has become an important symbol of identity for most of those interviewed for this study. As is the case with other Italian associations, connecting with the Society of Saint Hilarion means belonging to a clearly identifiable community. This has distinct advantages in that contact is renewed and strengthened with both relatives and friends, akin to the companionship that once existed in Caulonia. The Centre provides opportunities for reminiscing and sharing similar past experiences and represents a tangible expression of oneness, which is demonstrated through preparing Cauloniese food, eating together, dancing and celebrating together special occasions such as Christmas, Easter and Carnevale. Indeed, many of the *cauloniesi* interviewed claimed that community life in Australia today is more cohesive than it was in Caulonia.

The Society of Saint Hilarion also has other functions: it provides advice and assistance of a professional nature through, for example, medical, legal, and business contacts; and it actively encourages the participation of the younger generations in the community activities so that they are introduced to and share in Cauloniese traditions and way of life.

In the late 1980s, the Society built and opened three nursing homes and now it is looking at amalgamating two of the original facilities to build a new, larger one. The Saint Hilarion nursing homes have been established to accommodate elderly Italians who today, because of the busy lifestyle of their children, are not always able to count on family care. These facilities have helped many residents to maintain their identity in an understanding environment where they can speak Italian, their first language, to which the elderly instinctively revert, having forgotten much of their adopted limited English. In this progression from the initial desire to maintain strong the religious bonds that connect the devotees to their hometown, to the subsequent establishment of a community centre and the nursing homes, the members of the Society have pursued host-country oriented goals and have carved a niche for themselves in the wider South Australian public sphere. This transnational celebration

¹⁵ *La Gazzetta del Sud*, 27 March 1999.

of an Italian village community and its increasing involvement locally in the provision of age care differentiates it from the other Italian communities in South Australia.

At the same time, it is at the individual level that the bond between the migrants and the homeland become most evident. In recent years, thanks to improved forms of communication as well as the generally greater financial security now experienced by Italians both at home and abroad the frequency of return visits to Caulonia from Australia and vice versa are intensifying.

Return visits to the hometown can be best described as “an activity carried out by individuals who have explicit social and cultural ties to a destination, usually the hometown, as a result of emigration” (Duval 2004:53). As well demonstrated by Baldassar (2001) in her research on the migration experience between migrants from San Fior residing in Australia and their kin residing in Italy, the visit to the hometown is a significant phase in the migratory process that provides an understanding of how migrants’ identity is constructed and managed between the country of origin and that of adoption.

Different types of visits in both directions, their frequency, length, and the difficulties and challenges associated with the visits are identified in this part of the paper, which also considers how the migrants position themselves within the context of their birthplace and the location in which they have migrated. To what extent do the visits to the hometown influence their sense of belonging and identity? Also, if the non-migrants and those who have repatriated visit their kin in Australia, what are their reasons for doing so?

The frequency of the visit has changed over time with the simplification and popularity of travel and its increasing availability and affordability. When people had to rely on costly and time-consuming journeys by ship, visits were infrequent. Today, when plane travel is more accessible and more time efficient, visits have become more frequent. However, the data collected for this study suggests that the visit is much more common from Australia to Caulonia than vice versa. This is attributable to the fact that migrants in Australia have access to greater financial resources, but it also suggests that the expectation of visiting falls more on the people who have migrated than on those who have stayed behind.¹⁶

The fifty-three Cauloniese migrants interviewed reported that the shortest length of time spent abroad before visiting the hometown was four years, the longest fifty-seven. The length of the visit to Caulonia has ranged from two days to six months with the most common being four weeks. The migrants who own an apartment in Caulonia or choose to rent one while visiting seem to visit more regularly and for a longer period compared to the migrants who rely on the accommodation offered by their relatives.¹⁷ The visit from Caulonia to Australia of the return migrants and the non-migrants ranged from forty days to nine months, with the average being three months. The noticeable difference in the length of the visit from Caulonia to Australia compared to the one in the other direction can be attributed to the fact that the return migrants and the non-migrants relied on the

¹⁶ Baldassar has argued in her study of the contacts maintained between Veneto migrants in Perth and their hometown San Fior in Italy that the migrants have been granted ‘licence to leave’ by their townspeople who have remained, while they have acquired simultaneously an obligation to return. See Baldassar, L. (2001), *op. cit.*, in particular chapter 1. See also Mason, J. (2004). Managing kinship over long distances: The Significance of ‘The Visit’. *Social Policy & Society* 3-4: 421-429. Available at: http://journals.cambridge.org/download.php?file=%2FSPS%2FSPS3_04%2FS1474746404002052a.pdf&code=928c6c6aa8db0d2b5695a37a3d8fa71f

¹⁷ Similar findings have been reported by Baldassar, *op. cit.*, 2001.

accommodation offered by several sets of relatives and friends who not only reside in different suburbs of Adelaide, but also in different Australian states. The longest visits of seven, eight and nine months undertaken by some return migrants were associated with their attempt to return to resettle in Australia, while such long visits on the part of the non-migrants were associated with their attempt to migrate to Australia.

Different reasons for the visit in both directions have been identified. Visiting family was the principal reason why migrants visited their hometown and why the return migrants and the non-migrants visited Australia. Many Cauloniese migrants still have relatives in Caulonia, and are pleased to show their hometown, and indeed their old home, to their Australian-born children. These visits often occurred in combination with key life-cycle events such as weddings, honeymoon, births of children and special birthday celebrations. Due to the greater affordability of air travel there has also been a rise in the visits to family members that incorporate visits to the major cities elsewhere in Italy that the migrants had only heard about at the time of their departure from Italy.

Another important type of visit identified among the Cauloniese migrants in Australia is the one that perpetuates cultural ties. These visits to reconnect with the place have been undertaken by the migrants who do not visit very often, perhaps once or twice in a lifetime. Their purpose is to reconnect with the birthplace and the village identity through participation in special religious festivals, especially the one in honour of the patron saint, Saint Hilarion. As previously observed, this kind of visit takes place in both directions, and strengthens the cultural and religious ties between the two communities.

Similarly, the visits to Australia of the return migrants and non-migrants usually occurred in conjunction with some of the important life-cycle events, especially honeymoons and special birthdays. The main difference between the reasons for visiting stated by the return migrants and by the non-migrants was that for the return migrants the visit was principally undertaken to maintain alive the relationships with a close-knit community that were part of their life prior to returning to Italy, while for the non-migrants it was about seeing in person how their *compaesani* had settled and lived in Australia.

Many of the return migrants interviewed admitted missing the deep sense of community that typified the *cauloniesi* in Australia: it had been disappointing for them not to find back home the same network of mutual support that they had experienced abroad. An interviewee who had spent twenty-four years in Australia before repatriating, observed:

In Australia they [the *cauloniesi*] are closer to each other, perhaps because they are in a foreign land. So they are always visiting one another. In Australia, before you'd even had time to finish your Sunday lunch, there was already somebody dropping in to pay you a visit; here in Italy it's different.¹⁸

The longing for the social cohesion with family and kin experienced in Australia and absent in their daily life in Italy caused in the return migrants a sense of ambivalent belonging. When asked if they identified with their hometown or with Australia, the most common answers were: "I feel Italo-Australian and it is as if a part

¹⁸ Transcript of interview with C.C., Caulonia, June, 2002.

of me is still in Australia”;¹⁹ “I still feel a bit Australian, Australia has remained in my blood”.²⁰ The interviewees who feel this ambivalent sense of belonging are also those who visit Australia most frequently. Thus, the visit for this sample group not only helps to sustain a community network, enabling it to remain active and meaningful over time and over a long distance, but also nurtures in those who repatriated a sense of belonging to a very close-knit community abroad.

The idea of undertaking a visit to Australia is often in the minds of the non-migrant group. Despite the distance and the expense involved, many have in fact visited, and those who have not hope to do so sometime in the future. People who have visited wanted to see how their relatives and friends had settled and how life in Australia was. What is evident from the data obtained from this sample is that the visit extended well beyond simply the personal and family confines and contributed to establishing a wider community network. One of the interviewees explained:

Here in Italy we don't demonstrate the same affection, the same attachment that you find over there. Even the families and the *compaesani* that I didn't even know [in Australia] would invite me so as to ask me questions about how things were over here and to enquire about the people they knew here [in Italy].²¹

By evoking and reaffirming a common past and familiar places the non-migrant *cauloniesi* provided a focal point that stimulated and widened the kinship network.

As previously observed, group visits have been particularly popular among the non-migrants. This is probably due to the fact that it is more reassuring for these *cauloniesi* to travel in a group, since in most cases they have only very limited knowledge, or no knowledge at all, of the English language.

The giving or receiving of care across borders that have been explored by recent studies on transnational care (Ackers & Dwyer 2002, Mason 2004, Baldassar et al. 2007) were not defining features of the visits to Caulonia or vice versa, as in the data collected there were no examples of visits in either direction which involved the specific need to care for an ill member of the family who had remained in Italy or was living in Australia.

Apart from the reasons for visiting, reasons for not visiting have also been identified. The relevance of family ties is also important here. Two of the migrants in Adelaide who have never visited Caulonia said that they have never returned because their relatives had died and they did not have any reason to visit. A couple said that they used to visit regularly, but now that their parents have passed away they no longer go there. The visit home was also perceived by some of the migrants as a reminder of the hardship that they had to endure before migrating. One woman, for example, who has never returned to Caulonia since her departure in 1951, said:

I have never gone back to Caulonia and don't want to return because it would remind me of how difficult life once was over

¹⁹ Transcript of interview with M.A., Caulonia, June, 2002.

²⁰ Transcript of interview with C.C. Caulonia, June, 2002.

²¹ Transcript of interview with F.T, Caulonia, June, 2004 .

there when I had to carry bundles of wood on my head, pick olives or go to the river to do the washing.²²

Family commitments, work, financial and health reasons were also reasons for not visiting, especially among the returnees and the non-migrants.

The visit experience, while mostly enjoyable, also presented the migrants with difficulties and challenges. This section of the paper deals with the problems associated with the visit to Caulonia that relate to coping with changes in the loved ones, in the environment, and with being identified as a foreigner rather than a local.

For many it was an emotional experience to realise that after so many years abroad dear friends and family had either died or changed in such a way that they could not even be recognised. One woman, who left in 1950 to go to Australia as a proxy bride and after twenty-five years managed to visit her hometown, said:

After twenty-five years I went back and nobody I knew was there any more because they had all migrated to the north of Italy or were dead. The town was different, all the houses were empty and closed, there wasn't a soul around and the young people did not know us. I didn't even recognise my brother. When I arrived at the Caulonia Marina railway station I recognised a friend and asked him "Hasn't anybody from my family come?" and he replied that the young man standing next to me was my brother. I had not recognised him because when I migrated he was just a child and now he was a grown man.²³

Not only had relatives and friends changed beyond recognition but so too had the surroundings, something that particularly struck those migrants who had migrated before the hamlet of Caulonia Marina was established in 1951. They were quite amazed to find that where they remembered only a railway station and a few scattered houses, there was now a modern and developed town. Apart from these differences, they also noted that the new town lacked the community spirit that used to characterise life in the old village and felt that there was a division between the people who today reside in Caulonia Marina and those who reside in the old town of Caulonia Superiore, which in the memory of the migrants remains the focal point for them of religious and social activities. Furthermore, some of the non-migrants interviewed in Caulonia observed that the visiting migrants hoped to find tangible connections with their past and were disappointed when they saw how much the environment in Caulonia had changed. One non-migrant said:

Most visitors asked to be taken to visit the places where they used to live before migrating so that they could remember their childhood and youth, but they felt a bit lost when they saw how much the urban landscape had changed.²⁴

²² Transcript of interview with G.V. Berri, SA, June, 2004.

²³ Transcript of interview with M.A. Adelaide, SA, June, 2002.

²⁴ Transcript of interview with C.D. Caulonia, June, 2004.

The most disappointing and difficult aspect of the return visit related to the fact that many migrants felt that they were not accepted as community members. After the initial happiness of being reunited with their loved ones, both the migrants and the non-migrants soon realise, not without a sense of bewilderment, that they are quite different, that their life experiences have brought about profound changes, especially in relation to attitudes to family, society and cultural traditions.²⁵ This awareness of being different, when it occurs, sometimes generates great disappointment in the visiting migrants who still identify with their hometown.

One of the consequences of being a migrant is that their identity becomes bi-national, embedded in two separate worlds and two separate existences: on the one hand, in their adopted country, Australia, they might feel and be perceived as different, especially when, even after many years, they find themselves being labelled 'Italian' or 'ethnic'; on the other hand, when they return home for a visit, they might find that they are unable to merge into home town life (Baldassar 2001). The visitors sometimes discover that the *cauloniesi* who never migrated are protective of their present-day *cauloniesità* ('Cauloniese-ness') and hesitate to welcome them as former members of the town community.

In the data there were no examples of difficulties experienced by returnees and non-migrants who visited Australia. Indeed, most commented on the hospitality demonstrated by their counterparts during their visit. A couple who travelled to Australia for their honeymoon and spent four months between Adelaide and Mildura commented:

They all came to the airport, family and friends and we will never forget those four months spent in Australia. They welcomed us like their children. Here [in Caulonia], we do not have so much respect for visitors as they do over there for us. When they see a *paesano* it is as if they saw a piece of their homeland. We don't have that enthusiasm, that fervour. Now, if somebody comes to visit from Australia, we try to be as hospitable as we can because we remember the welcome we received over there from them and we want to make them feel at ease. While the people from Caulonia who haven't visited Australia are different, they don't understand that migrants always have their hometown in their heart.²⁶

Conclusion

The findings have shown that the *cauloniesi* have maintained a strong connection with their hometown: the bonds are most noticeable and significant at the time of religious and social functions and during two-way visits of individuals and groups who travel from Australia to Caulonia and vice versa. The paper has provided an insight into how the Cauloniese migrants in Australia use religion to extend the local boundaries of their village into a new land and how from these initial religious ties they have asserted a local identity, different from other Italian groups, through the establishment

²⁵ See Cosmini-Rose, D. (2004). Calabrian settlement in South Australia with specific reference to migrants from Caulonia. In D. O'Connor (ed.), *Memories and Identities*, op. cit: 136-138.

²⁶ Transcript of interview with R. D, Caulonia, June 2004.

of a community centre and their commitment to aged care. The ties are also nurtured by individual and reciprocal group visits from Australia to Caulonia and vice versa that strengthen the family and community bonds and make the return migrants and the non-migrants part of the same social field.

Attachment to birthplace remains deeply rooted in the psyche of the Cauloniese migrants in Australia. For them, as for other migrants who settle in a foreign land, the physical return to their origins assists in confirming and reinforcing their identity and heritage and provides the opportunity for renewal and deeper understanding of self: people change over time, places change, who people are is inevitably bound up with their past and with their roots, as well as with their day-to-day experiences. For Cauloniese migrants in Australia their *italianità* or *cauloniesità* is a continuous process of transformation.

What the migrants see and feel on going back home inevitably leads them to make comparisons between the two places, but rarely has the return visit been an occasion for them to compare life in Australia and in Caulonia in order to decide where they should finally settle. In fact, the vast majority of the *cauloniesi* in Adelaide have never had, since their migration to Australia, any wish to resettle back home, although most of them like to return for a visit. The comment that was often made was “It is nice to go there on holidays with plenty of money, but not to return to live there”.

Although they still continue to feel a strong bond towards the town where they were born, and feel the obligation to visit it to honour their family and community ties, they also defend the decision that they have taken to emigrate, and express a moral obligation towards their host country. The transnational connections have different meanings for the different groups that make up the sample of this study: in the migrants, they generate an ambivalent sense of belonging to the native town, but also to the country where they have settled, while the return migrants nurture their sense of belonging to a close-knit community that was once part of their lives prior to their return to Caulonia. In the case of the non-migrants the connections reinforce the acknowledgement that migration has an ongoing impact not only on the migrants but also on themselves and their local community.

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